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SUBJECT: Muslim Political Observers On Risk of Extremist Violence in Germany

REF: A) The Hague 2864 B) Frankfurt 6156 (NOTAL) C) Hamburg

60 D) 02 Frankfurt 10187, E) Frankfurt 1390 F) Frankfurt 9141 G) Frankfurt 0567

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Muslim political contacts in Frankfurt's district see the predominantly secular character of Germany's largely Turkish Muslim community as a bulwark against Islamic extremism but cite the area's growing North African population and the presence of far-right German groups as potentially destabilizing factors. While fragmented religiously and politically, ethnic Turks in Germany are united across party and religious lines by their support for Turkey's entry into the European Union. END SUMMARY.

Turkish Secularism Makes Extremism in Germany Less Likely

2. (SBU) Consulate representatives met with Muslim representatives of Germany's major political parties to assess the danger of Islamist attacks along the lines of that against the Dutch filmmaker Van Gogh and potential reactionary violence against Germany's 3.1 million Muslims. Former European Parliament member Ozan Ceyhun (Social Democrats/SPD) underscored the largely Turkish and secular composition of Germany's Muslim population as a safeguard against religious extremism. Ceyhun warned, however, that Germany's growing North African community (while still relatively small) harbors significant religious fundamentalist and anti-American elements.

3. (SBU) Hesse Green Party caucus chief Tarek Al Wazir (of Yemeni descent) noted that fundamentalist Muslims -- while a minority -- are less inclined to integrate into local communities and often retain ties with like-minded groups outside Germany, opening the door for extremist influences from other parts of Europe and the Middle East. (NOTE: Alleged Al Qaeda Hamburg cell member and September 11 plotter Mounir el-Motassadeq came from Morocco, while a Frankfurt terror cell convicted of plotting to attack the Strasbourg Christmas Market in 2000 was of Algerian origin. A Frankfurt mosque raided by police in June on suspicions of extremist activity received partial funding from the Moroccan consulate (refs B-D) END NOTE).

Fear of Right-Wing Violence

4. (SBU) Ceyhun expressed fear that right-wing political groups could carry out "reprisal" attacks against Muslims in the wake of the Van Gogh controversy in the Netherlands. Local Muslims reacted with alarm to the November 18 firebombing of a Turkish mosque in Sinsheim near Heidelberg (no one was hurt in the attack). Following the December 3 arrest of a 17-year old ethnic German of Tajik origin in connection with the bombing, however, Baden-Wuerttemberg police described the attack as an isolated incident.

Muslim Political Participation On The Rise

5. (SBU) Muslim political participation in the region has increased significantly in recent years, fueled in part by expanded naturalization under the federal citizenship law of 2000. Over 700,000 Muslims in Germany now carry a German passport, and another 800,000 were born in Germany. Turkish Germans are predominantly Sunni with a significant Alevi minority. Although socially conservative, the vast majority of Turkish voters (80% in 2002 national elections) back the SPD because of its support for Turkey's EU membership bid. Germany's Green Party has also seen a rise in Turkish membership because of a platform that is seen as friendly towards immigrants and opposes recent anti-headscarf laws (refs E-F).

6. (SBU) Mr. Sina Afra of the Liberal Turkish-German Union (a Free Democrat/FDP-affiliated group) estimated that 10-15% of Germany's Turkish community are non-practicing, while an equivalent are deeply religious. The majority are somewhat

observant but increasingly participate in German society: Afra cited as an example the increasing number of Turkish high school graduates in Germany (from only 2,000 in 1989 to around 45,000 today). Ceyhun affirmed the positive trends but noted that Muslims integrate into German society at varying speeds; even many with German citizenship live in Muslim sub-communities. Several city governments in SW Germany have pioneered successful initiatives to integrate their large immigrant populations, particularly Frankfurt's "Mama learns German and Papa too", a program providing German-language instruction to immigrant mothers and fathers (ref G).

Support for Turkey's EU Entry Trumps Party Affiliation

17. (SBU) Our Muslim interlocutors noted broad and vocal support among Turkish Germans for Turkey's entry into the EU. Not surprisingly, contacts made the case for Turkey to be judged fairly under the Copenhagen agreement, with Al Wazir remarking that Germany "cannot renege on promises made to Turkey decades ago." Mr. Meze Zafer of the German-Turkish Forum (a Christian Democrat/CDU affiliated political group) opined that support for Turkey's EU membership tends to isolate Turkish CDU members from fellow conservatives and hinders progress on other political and religious issues. Ceyhun struck a rare discordant note by saying that he believed Turkey would end up only with the "privileged partnership" envisioned by the CDU, painting instead a role for Turkey as leader of a group of pro-western states in the Middle East (including Egypt, Israel, and Iraq) that could partner with the EU on important issues. Ceyhun voiced his disappointment over Turkey's tepid participation in the coalition supporting a democratic Iraq.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Right-wing German politicians in this largely conservative region have used the Van Gogh incident and fears of Islamic extremism to score points in Germany's debate on integration, including Baden-Wuerttemberg Education Minister Annette Schavan, who declared that Germany should compel Muslim religious leaders to preach in German. Germany's Office for the Protection of the Constitution (which monitors extremism) estimates that only 0.1% of Germany's Muslims belong to radical Islamic movements and believe that the secular and moderate leanings of most Muslims in Germany mean that fundamentalist appeals are unlikely to gain traction within the community at large; although such groups pose an obvious danger.

19. (SBU) The economic contributions of Germany's Muslim immigrants (particularly given the country's aging workforce and dwindling birth rate) are significant; however, recent anti-headscarf laws show the country's struggle to integrate a culture seen by many as incompatible with "German" values (such as gender equality). Fear sparked by the Van Gogh murder has added a new subtext to Germany's continuing debate on how to accommodate diversity. END COMMENT.